

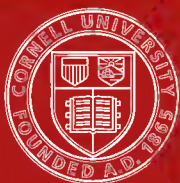
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ORNAMENTAL
DESIGN.

THE
APPLICATION
OF
ORNAMENT



Lewis F Day

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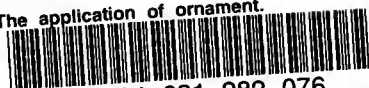
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The application of ornament.



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TEXT BOOKS OF ORNAMENTAL DESIGN.

By LEWIS F. DAY.

III.

THE APPLICATION OF ORNAMENT.

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TEXT BOOKS OF ORNAMENTAL DESIGN.

THE
APPLICATION OF ORNAMENT.

BY

LEWIS F. DAY,

AUTHOR OF 'EVERY-DAY ART,' 'THE ANATOMY OF PATTERN,' ETC.

ILLUSTRATED.

LONDON:
B. T. BATSFORD, 52, HIGH HOLBORN.
1888.



PREFACE.

The former text-books of this series concerned themselves with the rudimentary lines on which ornament may be designed and distributed.

It is only in theory, however, that ornament can be independently discussed. Practically it exists only relatively to its application. Apart from its place and purpose and the process of its doing, there is no such thing as ornament.

The necessity of adapting design to its position and use is as obvious as it is absolute. The need of conforming to the more technical conditions imposed by material, and the means of working it, is not so generally understood. It takes, perhaps, a craftsman thoroughly to appreciate its urgency.

These few chapters go to demonstrate how essential to ornament is its strict subordina-

tion to practical conditions ; how in all times and in all crafts good workmen have cheerfully accepted them ; and how the very forms of historic detail handed down to us grew out of obedience to them. In the genesis of ornament will be found the strongest argument for the study of technique.

The consideration of natural form and its adaptation to ornamental design is reserved for a separate volume.

LEWIS F. DAY.

13, *Mecklenburg Square, London, W.C.*

October 7th, 1888.

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THE APPLICATION OF ORNAMENT.

I.

THE RATIONALE OF THE CONVENTIONAL.

Concerning all questions of art, the difficulty of coming to any clear understanding is greatly increased by the totally different meanings attached to the terms, more or less technical, one cannot avoid using.

To begin with definitions does not greatly help us. We no sooner commence to define than we find ourselves stumbling against other words equally in need of explanation.

What a flood of light would be let in upon the question of decorative design, could we but agree amongst ourselves as to what is meant by the term "conventional"!

An English ornamentist understands by conventional treatment, such a rendering of natural forms as may be consistent with the

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decorative character of the work in hand. It implies to him that self-restraint, that intelligent selection, that recognition of material and its characteristics, that strict regard for the purpose and position of design, without which ornament does not so much as deserve the name of ornament.

To a Frenchman, on the other hand, it stands for all that is helpless and hopeless in art. "*C'est de la convention, ça,*" is the expression of his supremest contempt.

Of course it is not merely a matter of country. Not all Britons are agreed as to what they mean by the word conventional, nor all Frenchmen; but there is in the national interpretation of the term an explanation of the respect, as of the contempt, in which conventionality is held.

The continental use of the word is perhaps the more exact. The conventional is literally that which has come to be accepted; and, as a matter of experience, we find that, even in a world of progress, little or nothing is ever universally accepted until it is already tolerably stale. The accepted thing becomes, therefore, identified with all that is most deadly dull and tedious in modern art.

There seems to be no hope or promise in it ; it stands for stagnation.

Yet there is another side to the question. We find in the best work of nearly all periods, and of nearly all nations, certain principles which appear to have been generally obeyed ; so universally obeyed, indeed, as to warrant us in calling them the principles of decorative art.

In endeavouring to explain those principles, concerning which we have come to some sort of general understanding or agreement, the advocates of due restraint in ornament adopted in an evil hour the term conventional, to express that kind of treatment which, whatever it might be, was adapted to the purposes of decoration. But it proved less easy to grasp the elusive spirit of design than to take possession of the forms in which it was embodied. And the cut-and-dried character of the examples of design adduced by way of illustration, led to the supposition that the conventional was neither more nor less than the trite ; the literal meaning of the word lending itself to the confusion.

One may take it that the artistic verdict on convention will be mainly according to the

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artist's interpretation of the word. If by conventional ornament we mean perpetual variations on the old, old tunes, long since played out ; if we mean adherence to well-worn types ; if we mean affectation, imitation, mimicry, a bigoted belief in the letter of the law as it was in the days that are happily past ; no one of any originality or invention of his own—no artist, that is to say—can consistently belong to the party of convention.

If, however, what we understand by the term is the spirit in which the past masters of ornament accepted nature, finding in her a never-failing source of inspiration, reverencing her most deeply—aye, and following her most truly—in that they were not content to copy, without further thought, the forms nearest at hand, because they did not imagine for a moment that what she had made fit for her ends must, without modification, perforce be fittest for their very different purposes ;—then it seems hard to understand how ornament can properly be anything but conventional.

A fitter term might be found for it, no doubt ; I prefer myself the more expressive word “apt” ; but in discussing the thing we

cannot conveniently ignore the word by which it is currently known, and we find the word "conventional" in possession.

One can scarcely conceive of ornament which is not, in a manner, more or less modified by considerations altogether apart from the natural forms on which it may have been founded. Even the human form, which is our highest type, and with which liberty may less safely be taken than with any other of nature's works—even the human form is not ready-made to the hand of the sculptor. The works of the great masters, to which we accord the title of "monumental," are so in virtue of a something which was not in the model of the sculptor, but in his art.

Call this subtle quality what you will—conventional, traditional, monumental, ideal, individual—something there is in all applied art (in all art for that matter, but our concern is just now more especially with decorative and ornamental art), something which is, let us not say contrary to nature, for it belongs inherently to human nature, but non-natural, in the sense that it is not directly borrowed from natural forms.

Conventionality in ornament is another

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term for reticence or self-restraint. The artist who exercises no restraint upon himself will hardly command the full sympathy or admiration of Englishmen. Apart from the natural, or national, desire for some reserve in art, as in everything else, restraint is forced upon the ornamentist by all the conditions of his work, by its purpose, place, and means of execution, no less than by that necessity for repetition which, in these days more than ever, is a condition of its very existence.

II.

WHAT IS IMPLIED BY REPETITION.

The very purpose and position of ornament, the method of its execution, and even its construction, insist upon some treatment of natural forms which, for want of a better word, we call "conventional."

First, in reference to the construction of ornament. Its mere repetition, which in a former text-book ('The Anatomy of Pattern') was shown to be inevitable, would of itself render such treatment necessary; and even without the inducement of economy, which calls for the use of a machine, we should still resort to repetition, if only because the human brain cannot go on inventing without intermission, but needs the comparative rest of repeating itself, even in hand work.

In the artist's repetition of himself (unless the fatal pressure of the times have made him also a machine), there will always be a certain degree of variety, which there could

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not be in mere mechanical reproduction. But he cannot afford to dispense with repetition ; nor need he wish to dispense with it. It is in itself an element in decorative design ; it is a preventive against loose and rambling ornament ; it exhibits order, and gives scale.

The only question is, where and to what extent we should avail ourselves of it.

In proportion to the naturalism of a design, and the point of realism to which it is carried, it becomes unsuited to multiplication. To put it the other way about, the oftener it is proposed to repeat a form, the more imperative it is that it should be removed from the imitation of nature, and the further it should be removed. It needs, in short, adaptation to the purpose of repetition.

Such adaptation is strictly in proportion to what one may call its reticence. A highly elaborate and attractive feature—anything, certainly, that is in the least self-assertive—will not bear so much as reduplication ; whereas an insignificant device may be multiplied *ad infinitum*. In anything of the nature of a background (and so many manufactures are intended to serve only as backgrounds) repe-



16th Century German

Identical figures reversed

tition is of the utmost service, and repetition implies modification.

It follows from what has already been said as to the danger of tampering with the human figure, and the prominence it naturally assumes, that there is great difficulty in repeating it without offence. The interest of a pattern is enhanced, no doubt, by the recurrence at stated intervals of appropriate figures. But it is desirable that there shall be always some difference in them; for with every repetition of the same figure its charm is discounted. There is something exasperating in the reversing of identical figures in a pattern (Plate 2), when it is so simple a thing by the careful disposition of various creatures to retain the symmetry of effect desired (Plate 3).

Presumably the reason for introducing figures into ornamental design, is for the sake of some added interest there may be in them. But you cannot get up any absorbing interest in a series of figures all identically of one pattern. They suggest only the mechanism employed in producing them. The multiplication of the figure, far from multiplying its interest, diminishes it in proportion to the

number of times it is repeated. And though it be a very good thing that is repeated, the case is not greatly mended—it is so easy to have too much of a good thing.

The only safety is in toning down the repeated form until its recurrence ceases to be very obvious. This may be effected in various ways. In certain embossed leather, and such like designs, it is brought about partly by the low relief of the stamping, partly by the softness of the colouring, and partly by a more or less cunning complication of the figures with the rest of the design, so that they do not thrust themselves into notice. That variety in the creatures, were it possible, would be desirable no one can doubt.

The consideration which occurs in the case of figure design which it is so necessary to reduce to comparative insignificance is, whether it was then worth doing. Perhaps not. Except that ornament has a way of being a trifle too ornamental, or, more strictly speaking, too monotonously ornamental; and the introduction of any bold mass, such as the figure very readily gives, is one obvious way out of the besetting danger.

Apart from the symbolic intention of the



Variety in Creatures symmetrically disposed - German



Portion of a Tree of Jesse I. van Mecken end of 15th Centy.

"Photo-Tint", by J. Akerman, 6, Queen Square, W.C.

figures on Plate 4 (it is part of a genealogical tree of Jesse), the ornamental use of them in the design is conspicuous. We may take it that symbolism does not flourish where the symbols are ugly or unamenable to ornamental effect.

It is not suggested that we should be straightlaced to the extent of denying ourselves the amusement that may be got out of designs such as Mr. Crane has made popular in his nursery wall-papers, in which he has contrived to give us grace of line and charm of colour, as well as the humour of the nursery rhyme (Plate 5). Once in a while the human figure may be degraded to do the merest pattern work. The artist must be allowed, now and again, to put off his dignity and indulge in an artistic gambol. Even a bad joke may, on occasion, be more to the purpose than an everlasting seriousness.

Still it is as well to bear in mind the *primâ facie* objection to the repetition, not only of the human form, but of the forms even of birds, beasts, and all living, and especially moving, creatures.

The occurrence of the stag, boar, hare, fox, hounds, and birds in the border of which

portions are given on Plate 6, clearly gives point to the ornament ; and they are rendered with a certain conventionality which makes them one with it. To reconcile us to the repetition of these creatures would be a feat indeed. The grotesques introduced into the cretonne design on Plate 7 may perhaps be excused on the plea of their remoteness from nature in the first place, and further on account of the minuteness of the scale on which they are drawn : they are scarcely apparent at first sight. But their real justification is that they are a joke. Alas, it is not often that the conditions of manufacture allow us that relief.

The advisability of introducing animal forms into mechanically repeated manufacture depends entirely upon the possibility of keeping them in appropriate subjection—in their place, in fact—which, in turn, depends upon the art of the artist. There is a lesson for us in the artful way in which the designers of the Renaissance contrived to keep down the creatures, graceful or fantastic, with which they peopled their scrolls, subduing them to the decorative key. Where the forms which first take the eye are the bold lines of the leafage, among which the live things are more or less



hidden, so that it is only by degrees that one becomes fully conscious of them all, scarcely the purist can find cause of complaint. Some sort of mystery in design is always delightful. The perfection of art is reached when, however attractive at first sight, it continues to grow upon you, and the more you contemplate it, the more you see in it.

Natural forms, to be admissible in ornament, must be decoratively treated. Natural though they be, they must be at the same time ornamental. A lion, as Landseer modelled it, is not fit for any decorative purpose. An Egyptian or Assyrian lion, on the other hand, Donatello's lion at Florence, or Stevens's outside the British Museum, are admirably decorative.

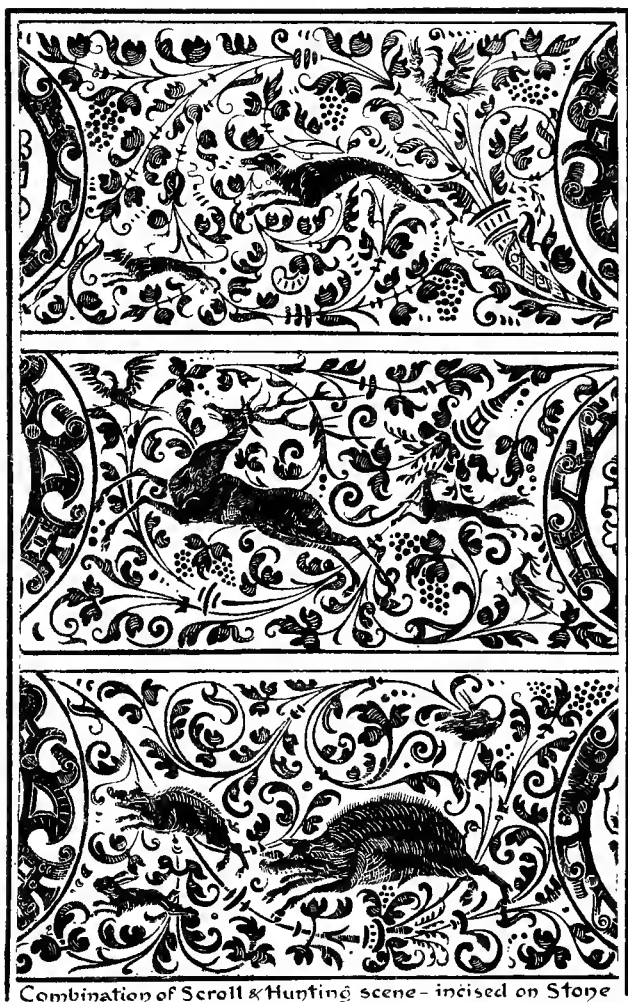
The objection to naturalism, or perhaps it would be more exact to say literalism, in forms repeated, applies not only to animal but even to floral forms. It exists in a less degree, inasmuch as they are of less prominent interest; but for all that it exists. The charm of the simplest flower is lost when we see, side by side, so many copies of it—not varieties, as they would be in nature, but stereotyped repetitions of the same thing.

The designer is exposed, by his very artistic

ability, to the temptation of aiming at natural effects, a temptation all the stronger because, few persons having knowledge enough to appreciate design, whilst all are more or less familiar with natural forms, there is nothing in the shape of public opinion to keep him in check.

Every artist likes, of course, to make a good drawing, and to carry it as far as he can. But that is not at all the vital point in decorative design: the all-important thing is the effect of the work in execution and in its place. Any one who thinks twice about it must realise that in very self-defence he is bound to consider the repetition of his design, and all else that concerns its use. If he is really a designer, he will know how to make capital out of the very poverty of the conditions to which he submits. Submit he must—better do it, then, with a good grace.

Some adaptation of natural forms, some simplification in fact, is demanded, not only to fit them for repetition, but, further, by the position and purpose of the work; sometimes in order that the detail may not assert itself too much, sometimes in order to give it the emphasis that is needed.



Combination of Scroll & Hunting scene - incised on Stone

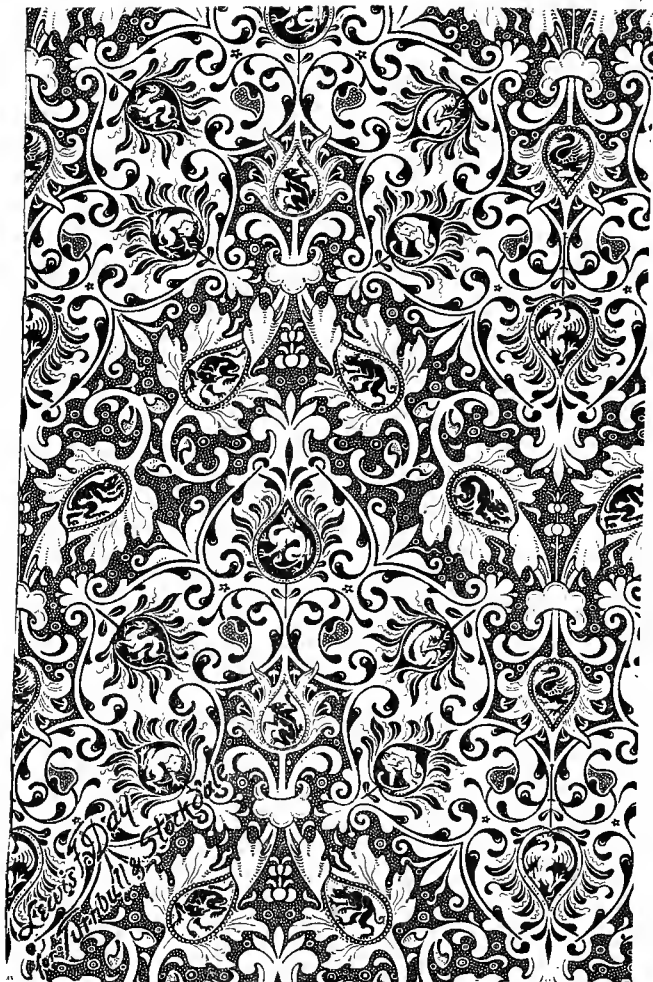
For example, it is quite a common thing to see an infinity of elaborate and laborious work misspent upon details of domestic furniture, which not only pass unnoticed, but which ought never to attract notice. It often seems as if the workman had set himself to show how far it was possible to go in the direction of minuteness of detail. It is quite possible to show that, and at the same time illustrate the futility of going anything like so far.

In proposing to carry execution to a point beyond what has hitherto been attempted, it is as well to ask oneself, whether there may not be good reason why the attempt has never been made. Our forerunners were not all of them fools, we may be sure. As a *tour de force*, once and again, most things may be admissible; but a wise workman rarely indulges of his own accord in that kind of "brag" (there is no better word for it) which exhibitions, international and other, have done so much to encourage.

A master is loth to waste labour, and he knows how to make his work hold its own without shouting at you. He deliberately does less than an inexperienced person would have thought necessary, with a view to making

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his design tell in its place. In wall decoration, for example, to be seen from some distance, a merely natural representation of natural forms would often go for very little. By the omission of multitudinous detail, he manages to emphasise what he is anxious to preserve. Or (since decorative treatment by no means consists in omission only) he exaggerates, perhaps, features in his design which, in the position assigned to it, would otherwise be lost. According to his purpose, he makes no scruple about modifying natural forms and colours: he enforces his effect, indeed, by every conventional—that is to say, every workman-like—expedient at his command.



III.

WHERE TO STOP IN ORNAMENT.

Assuming, on the one hand, the urgency for some modification of natural forms according to the work in hand, and on the other, of some continual reference to nature in design, the question arises as to the limits of the one and of the other. How far may one safely go in the direction of nature? And to what extent is it well to admit the dictation of the tool? In order to settle that point quite definitely, each separate craft would have to be discussed. An excellent prescription would be, just so much of natural food as the artistic stomach can digest ; but then we have to take into account each man's powers of artistic assimilation—always an unknown quantity. The degree of ornament which is barely enough for one man will be far too much for another.

Any attempt to define the limits within which decoration should reasonably be con-

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fined may seem at first sight rash enough. But with regard at all events to things of common everyday use, there clearly is a point at which the line of decoration must be drawn. And, more than this, just as the object itself, its use, its material, and the manner of its making, indicate plainly enough the fit method of its decoration, so also they give the hint as to the measure thereof. It would seem, in short, as though the point at which a material or a process failed were the point at which we might most conveniently stop, rather than bring in some supplementary process, which, under pretence of helping it out, ends more likely in supplanting it.

This will be made clearer by an example,—let us say pottery, in aid of which so many of the applied arts are called in, that we shall necessarily have to branch out by the way into discussion of the wider subject of applied ornament, with which this text-book is concerned.

The primitive way of making a pot is by what is known as “throwing,” that is to say, shaping the lump of wet clay with the hands as it revolves on the wheel before the potter. This, it should be observed, is at the same



time the way most directly conducive to artistic results (Plate 8).

Bigotry alone would seek to narrow the scope of a workman to any single process of making. One is fain to own that in the hands of an artist the lathe too may have its use (Plate 8). The so-called Etruscan vases (Plate 8) were turned on the lathe, the artist probably caring more about the painting of his vessel than its shape.

But whilst you watch the potter at his wheel, it appears to you that no supplementary process can be necessary. Almost from the moment he begins to hollow with his hands the revolving lump of plastic clay before him, it begins to take suave and beautiful shapes, gliding the one into the other, as the wheel goes round, with an ease which it is delightful to see. It all seems to go so easily that your fingers itch to try a turn at it. Seeing the potter at his work, you see how the typical pottery forms grew out of his fingers; you realise how it is that ugly forms are so rare in primitive pottery; and you are inclined to think that the ugliest pot ever made on the wheel must have passed in the making through several stages of

beautiful form, which the potter, sitting *over* his work, did not perceive perhaps, or did not see to be beautiful.

It is taken for granted by our makers-by-deputy, that the soft shapes of the wheel need to be effaced by the more mechanical action of the lathe—in other words, that a second and supplementary process should be called in to do the work over again. It is true that only certain shapes can conveniently be thrown on the wheel. But these are obviously the most beautiful. There may be monotony in them, but so there is in the shapes of turnery.

Moreover, if the potter were in the habit of depending more upon the wheel, he would surely find in it still further facilities. If the blunt forms produced by his finger-tips are wanting somewhat in precision, he might even use the modelling-tool (reticently, as an artist would) to make indentations smaller than with his fingers only he could. But that is a very different thing from submitting his work to an after-process; and, in fact, effacing with a mere revolving plane, in the half-dry state of the clay, all that was done to it whilst it was amenably moist to



"PHOTO-TINT", by J. Alkerman, 6, Queen Square, W.C.

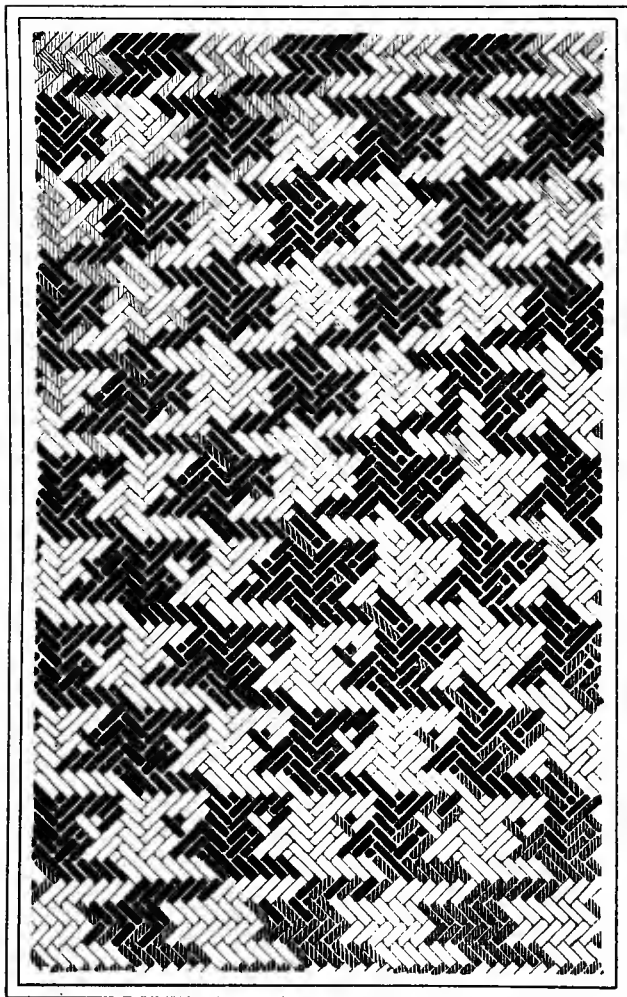
the hand. If any such final shaving is to take place there is, artistically, small reason for the preparatory process of throwing. The thing might just as well be cast, or otherwise mechanically made from the commencement, since there is to be nothing but what is mechanical in the result. There is this against after-processes generally. They are apt to undo a great deal of what has been done. How fatally the final process of glass-papering wipes all character out of our modern wood-carving ; whereas one great charm about old work (Plate 9) is in that crispness of touch which tells of the carver's chisel.

The excuse in the particular instance of earthenware (there is always an excuse ready for unworkmanlikeness) is in some supposed advantages of lightness and so-called elegance. The answer to this is that lightness is not the quality most characteristic of, or especially desirable in, pottery. If it is elegance we want we had better employ glass (Plate 8), the convenient and conventional treatment of which is all in the direction of grace and airiness. A bubble, whether blown in molten glass or soap and water, is a bubble. In earthenware we had best be content with

the subtle and beautiful, if heavier, forms the wet clay gives us.

The various vessels on Plate 8 are all characteristic of the process of their making. The Chinese vase and the ruder earthen pot have that softness of contour which comes of throwing on the wheel. The Greek vase shows, by its harder and more precise outline, that it was finished on the lathe. The coarse but rich ornament of the German tankard is appropriate to stamped stoneware. The savagery of the cut crystal cup, and the fantastic grace of the Venetian wine-glass, are no less characteristic and workmanlike.

Apart from the commercial incentive to make *his* craft fulfil all manner of impossible purposes, the workman unfortunately (and this is true of us all, whatever our walk in art) always wants to do more than his means will let him. It is the rarest thing in the world to know where to stay your hand, or to have the self-restraint to stay it. It is the more necessary therefore to insist—one cannot insist too strongly—that in ornament, at all events in ornament applied to any useful purpose, it is best to stop when the material itself gives you the hint. In the “convention ”



Basket-work

African

of work in which that hint has been taken, there is always a fitness or rightness which is inestimable in art applied. Would any more pretentious form of art be so entirely satisfactory for the purpose of basketwork as the ingeniously plaited pattern on Plate 10?

If you once go beyond the resources of your material there is no knowing where to pull up; and few indeed are they who manage to halt in time. You may go on until you reach a sort of lower stage of "high art"; but in doing that you inevitably lose those qualities of usefulness and fitness which are the only justification of art, excepting only such as may be of the supreme beauty to justify its claims to independence. A great work of art is a kind of king among created things, deserving of all homage. But we don't want this work-a-day world peopled with kings, least of all with petty princes and pretenders.

To return to the instance in point, when it comes to the after-decoration of earthenware, the rule of convention holds equally good: "If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly." Elaborate and difficult processes, involving something in the nature of a *tour de force*, are a snare to the

artist and a delusion to the buyer. The salesman has a way of excusing the high price of a thing on the score of the difficulty there was in making it. But was it worth while? That is the question. Apart from its superiority in design, there is not much to choose between the Portland vase and the marvellously cut glass or crystal of modern Bohemia. They are the very extravagance of workmanship, and as such merit the praise due to all patient labour, and no more. The simplicity and appropriate breadth of treatment of the crystal cup on Plate 8 is vastly more workmanlike than either. Patience does not rank, outside the copybook, as the virtue of virtues. Without some share of it genius falls short; nevertheless the power of taking pains does *not* constitute genius, nor will it even enable one to design so much as a good pattern.

But this is straying rather from the point, which is, that material and process may be trusted to suggest the character of decoration and the point at which it should be restrained. The lavish and unintelligent use of ornament about us is enough to reduce one to despair. In our longing for palatable ornament we seem sometimes to see

pattern, pattern everywhere, and not a line in place.

Suppose an earthen vessel is somehow to be enriched with colour, the simplest and about the most obvious means to employ is to dip it into a coloured glaze, just as the simplest way to dye a textile is to dip it into the vat. The glaze will naturally follow the law of gravitation, so that it is rather difficult to get an even colour by that means. But there is no artistic reason whatever why colour should be even. On the contrary, beautiful effects of quasi-accidental colour result from the running of the glaze. I say quasi-accidental, because the accidents in art are, or ought to be, foreseen and reckoned upon. Though the potter cannot be sure of any precise shade of colour, experience tells him within a little the kind of "fluke" he may anticipate. He fires, so to speak, with his eyes shut, but not quite so wildly as might seem. He takes a good look first at the object of his aim,—or he would not be so habitually near the mark.

In actual flaws and failures there is nearly always a lesson which artists have promptly turned to account—not by intentionally

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producing faulty work, but by noting how a new and beautiful, and at the same time workmanlike, effect may be obtained by working *with* the material. A coloured glaze, no doubt, may be too unequal; a careless or lazy workman may stop too soon. In the glazes of the Chinese and Japanese the change of colour is sometimes far too sudden. But even so, it is a hundred times to be preferred to the insipid evenness of tint which is the aim of so many a modern manufacturer. It was the aim too of the celebrated French potters, who laboriously produced some of the most excruciating tints—whether due to their own want of taste or to the vulgarity of the Du Barry and other such patrons, one hardly knows. In how many of the arts is insipid evenness reached, with infinite pains, and at the sacrifice of beauties peculiar to the material!

Greater variety of colour than is to be obtained by simple glaze may naturally be arrived at by in any way roughening the surface of the ware before it is dipped. And the judicious contrast of smoother and rougher parts is only what would naturally occur to the artist. This roughness may consist in the

merest scratching, or in raised modelling, which last is capable of being carried to the point even of competing with sculpture. In that case it enters a class of work not now under consideration. If the perfection of figure modelling is what is wanted (and this, again, applies to a great deal of misplaced figure work in decorative art generally), it would be so much more properly put to so many other purposes, that it is a mistake to apply it to the useful but homely pot.

The genius of Flaxman was, relatively speaking, wasted on those finikin and crudely-coloured medallions with which the most familiar form of Wedgwood ware is encrusted. A much more workmanlike process is that of painting in clay on clay, usually in white upon a coloured ground. M. Solon, with whose name it is associated in England, is not a Flaxman ; but his paintings in *pâte sur pâte*, as it is termed, are infinitely superior as pot-decoration to Wedgwood's moulded medallions. You get here the utmost delicacy of which the material is capable. Not that this utmost delicacy is a thing universally to be sought. It is a kind of luxury in which one may be occasionally allowed to indulge, or

in which here and there one competent may be permitted to indulge, growing as it does naturally out of a natural process of work. It is a sort of fine-gentleman cousin of the process that is easy and obvious enough for the decoration of ware for common use—that more rough and ready painting, namely, in clay or “slip,” as it is called, where the touches of the brush are left to tell their own tale. It is strange that the public should have to learn that the tale of the tool—brush, chisel, hammer, or whatever it may be—is never discreditable, and always interesting.

There is a something very direct and workmanlike in the way “slip” is used in modern Indian pottery. The dark-coloured clay is first patterned over in whitish slip, and then the whole is dipped in transparent glaze. It results from the very method of execution that the relief is *so* slight as not in any way to interfere with the form of the thing it enriches, nor yet in any way to hinder its usefulness. The necessarily restricted relief of repoussé metal is accounted for in a similar manner; whereas ornament in relief *applied* to a vase usually presents the appearance of so much excrescence upon it. The



"PHOTO-TINT," by J. Akerman, 6, Queen Square, W.C.

modelling you get with a brush is not likely ever to be in too bold relief, nor that which you get by punching too sharp.

A very suggestive illustration of appropriate flatness of relief resulting from a workmanlike proceeding, is given in Plate II, representing an old German book-cover in carved leather. The flatness is such that it is not unsuited for its purpose, and the quality of the material is retained. It looks like leather.

Sgraffitto, or the art of scratching, is another of those direct methods plainly appropriate to the decoration of earthenware. Just as the Italian decorator covered his tinted plaster with a layer of white plaster, and while it was yet soft scratched out his design (which thus appeared in the dark colour of the underground), so the potter dips his vessel of dark-toned clay into a paste of white, and on this outer coating proceeds to scratch his design. Or, of course, he may scratch on the moist body of the vessel itself, and rub colour into the incised lines.

These simple processes in a manner suggest themselves by their very easiness; and the blunt line produced by the point on the damp clay, has an ornamental character of its own

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well worth keeping. The delicate diaper lines, simply picked out of the painted ground (Plate 12), have a different character of their own.

The objection there is to obtaining relief by the application of cast ornament applies only in a less degree to rude and rough and less assuming work, such as German stoneware or *grès de Flandres* (Plate 8). Stamps or punches for impressing coarse patternwork, need to be used with judgment. Within certain limits one may employ in ornament, especially of the ruder kind, devices which would not be endurable in work of more lofty pretensions; still there is always a danger of hardness resulting from mechanical and perfunctory ways of working, even though, as in stoneware, the glaze may help to soften the forms. The important thing is that the end of beauty be gained without sacrifice of use, and without greater expenditure of time and labour than is justified by the purpose in view. The truly conventional way is the workmanlike way.

One would not by any means exclude human or animal figures from the sphere of ornamental design; but it should be of the

Plate 12.



"PHOTO-TINT", by J. Akerman & Co., Queen Square, W.C.

simplest and most spontaneous kind, such as can be done without effort and under no special disadvantage, such as in no way pretends to the accuracy, finish, or dignity of art unapplied. The figures on the Etruscan vases (Plate 8) were, ordinarily, painted right off without any great care for accuracy. Sometimes they are wild enough in drawing. If it comes easier to a man, or is more amusing to him, to devise human or animal forms rather than any other, by all means let him do that; but, in so doing, let him aim at what he can *best do under the circumstances*, and not ignore them, nor yet attempt to oppose them.

How desirable it is to let the mode of workmanship suggest the design, is shown by the futility of searching for qualities difficult of attainment in the material used. This is nowhere more apparent than in the painting of pottery. Think of all the miniatures in china turned out from the factories of Sèvres, Dresden, and Stoke—marvels of misapplied skill—and compare their absolute ineffectiveness as decorations with a bit of Italian or Persian faience (Plate 12), and see how the glory is all with the direct and untrammelled “conventional” art of the potter who made

the most of the beautiful capacities for colour and iridescent beauty which lay in his crucible, and how vain were the efforts of the would-be miniature or landscape painter. If he ever succeeded in getting what he sought (which is very doubtful), he certainly failed to produce decoration ; that was sacrificed, as it so often is, to a misplaced pictorial ambition.

This applies, *mutatis mutandis*, with equal force to decorative treatment in general. Whatever medium a painter may adopt, he is bound in reason to consider that medium, as he is bound to consider the work before him in adopting it—distemper, fresco, oil, encaustic, or whatever it may be.

In ceramic painting the choice lies between painting on the glaze and on the "biscuit," as it is called before it is glazed. For ordinary earthenware the more limited resources of the "underglaze" method offer all that the ornamentist need desire. One reason for our modern failures lies in the multitude of our facilities ; the secret of the ancient triumphs is often in the simplicity of the workman's resources.

The artist's choice of manner will be regulated to some extent by what he wants

to do. In any case, if he is discreet, he will limit his ambition to the range of his appliances. The china painter, that is to say, will think out a scheme of colour which, if not suggested by the oxides employed in ceramic painting, is not in any way opposed to them. This will, indeed, deprive him of some possible indulgence in naturalistic effect, but in the main it will lead him to more perfect achievement than would the pursuit of mere difficulties, without regard to the nature of vitreous colours and the action of the kiln upon them. One appreciates more fully the colour of the Persian or Damascus pottery when one realises that the painter's palette was set by the circumstances. It is only when we respect our materials that we get so much out of them.

The uncertainty of all colour which has to pass through the fire renders it most unwise to entertain a scheme which (whether founded upon nature or not) depends upon absolute accuracy of tint. The certain thing about vitreous colours is their uncertainty in the kiln.

The potter is working always more or less in the dark, since the value of his work is not

perceived until it comes out of the furnace. It may be within the bounds of possibility to get actual flesh tones in china colours; but at what a cost of risk, and at what a sacrifice of qualities (rich colour qualities, for example) so easily obtainable, and decoratively so much more valuable!

It is only reasonable that, if an artist elect flesh-painting as his *métier*, he should forswear whatever has to pass through the fire, and adopt a medium in which he can express himself with ease, or at all events without for ever breaking his heart over it. Better be an underwriter during perpetual high gales, or a large holder of doubtful stock in a time of general panic, than live the life of a pot-painter whose ambitions are all in opposition to his craft.

So in other crafts. The glass-painters of the best periods were content with white glass for their flesh tone. And it was for no lack of ability to get something more like flesh-colour that the great decorators of the 16th century adopted flesh tints, which certainly must be called conventional. However limited the resources of an art, a man knows them, or should know them, when he takes it up. Besides, every

medium has its inherent advantages as well as its limits—and it is these which should be turned to account. There is a liquid and transparent quality in water colour, which every water-colour painter wishes he could only retain beyond the wet stage of his picture. This is just what the china painter can get, without the least trouble, by simply floating on his colour with a full brush. Surely, then, that is the kind of thing to aim at, when it is within easy reach; instead of fidgetting it, or stippling it, or dabbing it with cotton wool, to the dull evenness so dear to the commercial mind, or otherwise laboriously seeking effects more easily and much better produced by other means. That loose, juicy, pot-like look is more valuable in ceramic painting than any degree of mere finish, and should be valued accordingly. So also the scheme of colour should have reference to what can best be done with the palette available.

In pottery painting, or whatever it may be, in all kinds of carving, in mosaic, in embroidery, in jewellery, everywhere it holds good, that the selection both of the forms and the colour should have direct reference to the technique employed. What is simplest under

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the circumstances is not only safest but most directly conducive to success ; and there is a further charm in the evidence of directness itself.

In all applied art, and in every stage of it, the work in hand points out the appropriate treatment ; it suggests the degree as well as the kind of conventionality to adopt ; you have but to heed its prompting and it will tell you what to do, and where to stop.

IV.

STYLE AND HANDICRAFT.

The purpose and position of ornament belong to the wider subject of decoration, at which we have not yet arrived, and come only incidentally under our consideration. On the method of its execution depends, as already said, the very conception of ornamental design. One cannot properly discuss style without reference to material and tools.

The style peculiar to each particular kind of work is, indeed, so strongly marked, that it would be quite feasible to classify ornament according to its evolution. Mr. Wornum's analogy between "style" in ornament and "hand" in writing, holds absolutely good. There never was a tool or process but it wrote its character on the work done. It was so in a simple practical matter like lettering. The cuneiform character of the Assyrian inscriptions was developed chisel in hand. It was the chisel shaped the hieroglyphs of Egypt.

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In a certain bluntness of the early Greek character the influence of the stylus is apparent. Chinese and Japanese writing must first have been done with the brush.

The various shapes of letters on Plate 13 are instructive. The simple form of the Roman capitals **A B C** might, like the Greek, first have been indented on a soft substance with a point. The later form of lettering, **D E F**, with its varying thickness of line and its spurred extremities, was better calculated for engraving on hard stone. The use of the thick and thin lines (the down-stroke and the up-stroke) comes of the use of the pen, and so, plainly, does the characteristic thickening of the backs of certain Gothic capitals such as the **G**. The smaller Roman letters, **h i j**, and still more plainly the italics *k l m*, are unmistakably related to the "round-hand" **n o p**. But it is in the medieval "black letter" that penmanship is most plainly pronounced, as in the letters **q r s**, in the capitals **T U V**, and in the more fantastically flourishing **W** on the same plate.

That our own printed type does not more distinctly reveal the intervention of the metal worker, is accounted for by our following the



historic, pen-born, fashion of lettering—I would say, too closely, but that history and sentiment must be allowed to count for something ; and it would be hard to set a limit on their just influence.

In our day we are given to the cultivation of “a good business hand,” which is just a little characterless and monotonous, as are indeed the lives of some of us who accomplish that modest end. Time was when the pen of the ready writer indulged in occasional flourishes. There is no time for such frivolity nowadays ; and what little character there is left in our handwriting seems likely to be sacrificed to the convenience of the stylographic pen—even if we do not give up penmanship altogether in favour of the “type-writer.”

Style, then, is not so much a thing of dates and countries as of materials and tools.

Whenever the development of ornament is discussed, it is the custom to begin with the savage. How the aboriginal developed into the Assyrian is not very clearly shown. But from Assyrian art is traced Egyptian, and from that again Greek art, and its Roman imitation—all very plausibly. The foundation of Byzantine art upon the ruins of

Classic, the growth of Gothic, the reaction of the Renaissance, its transplanting, and its degradation, follow in accustomed order.

It is easier to jog along this well-beaten road, though it be a trifle tedious, than to explain how, all the while, parallel with this, Oriental art was pursuing a course of its own, infringing, nevertheless, at times upon Western art, and whenever that was the case, leaving the imprint of its touch upon it.

This would be well worth doing; but it would take volumes to do it in, and would demand, besides, historical knowledge far greater than I can pretend to—a knowledge perhaps scarcely compatible with the necessary knowledge of art. One feels always how hard it is for the artist to equip himself with the necessary scientific and historic knowledge; as for the man of learning and research to cultivate that susceptibility to art necessary to any profitable discussion of the subject.

Still more to the purpose would it be to classify ornament according as it was plaited, notched, scratched, turned, modelled, carved, inlaid, printed, woven, embroidered, or what not (see Plates 10, 30, 12, 37, 21, 9, 36, 7, 19, 40, respectively).



"PHOTO-TINY", by J. Akerman, 6, Queen Square, W.C.



"PHOTO-TINT", by J. Akerman, 6, Queen Square, W.C.

- In such a classification architecture would divide itself into masonry, brick, concrete, timber, plaster, and iron styles. The subsidiary arts would class themselves in conformity with the use of clay, stone, wood, metal, yarn, and so on.

There would be further subdivisions into granite, marble, sandstone ; into hard and soft wood, close grained and variegated ; into wrought, cast, chased or beaten metal ; into tapestry, cloth, damask, velvet, lace, brocade, embroidery, and the like.

What are known as the historic styles might be examined by the way ; they would go to illustrate the development of style more technically considered. In all probability it would be shown that, wherever the historic style is marked, its character is to be traced to some mode of workmanship which, if it did not actually inspire it, made it advisable. The characteristic ornamental forms of a period or people can usually be traced to the technique and needs of that same people. In this far, ornament rises to the dignity of history.

A tolerably clear idea of style is conveyed to us at once by the mention of Egyptian,

Greek, Gothic, or Renaissance sculpture. But if we compare for a moment the carving of Egypt, of Greece, and of Medieval and Renaissance Europe, we shall see at once that the styles are not more distinctly of a place and of a period than they are markedly granite, marble, and soft stone styles.

The monumental simplicity of the graven obelisk, the refinement of the Panathenaic frieze, the rude grandeur of the Gothic portal, the delicate elaboration of the Italian arabesque, were but the natural development of resources at hand. Working in porphyry, basalt, or granite, severe simplicity was inevitable, and the Egyptian (Plate 14) was severe with a vengeance. There was no temptation to him, to fritter away all breadth in the accumulation of petty detail. On the other hand, the even textured but less obstinate marble encouraged the Greek sculptor and his fifteenth century successor (Plates 15 and 16) to greater and ever greater subtlety of execution; which again would have been quite out of the question in working the more friable sandstone native to Northern Europe (Plate 17).

We associate the coarser treatment with



"Photo-Tint," by J. Akersman, 6, Queen Square, W.C.



"PHOTO-TINT", by J. Akerman, 6, Queen Square, W.C.

Gothic carving in particular. It is all the more noticeable, therefore, how the sculptor of the Renaissance, working in a coarse stone, arrived at results in some respects so like Gothic work. Compare Plate 16 with Plate 17, and see the difference between early Renaissance marble and later Renaissance sandstone. The later work is much the rougher, as sandstone is rougher than marble.

Apart from all that has been said, there are conditions of sunlight and grey skies, dry atmosphere and moist, which also have their say in the character of carving everywhere.

To explain at length the invariable conventionality of historic ornament, would be to write the history of the various crafts, each of which might claim a treatise to itself. All that one can do within the limits of a manual like this is to give instances, typical as may be, of the influence of material, tool, or process of execution upon design, and to show how the forms of ornament were inevitably modified by such influence, if not actually due to it.

In discussing in a former text-book the anatomy of pattern, I pointed out how its construction was affected by, and very often

directly due to, some particular manufacture or method of work. So it is with the details of ornamental design.

The exquisite simplicity of certain characteristic patterns familiar in the figured velvets of the 15th century, is cleverly calculated to disturb the least possible amount of the sumptuous pile, so that the full value of the rich texture is preserved.

In the old-fashioned damask patterns the big broad leaves and scrolls are planned (like a Turkey carpet or an Indian rug) with a view, before all things, of getting a broken effect of colour. The designer relied upon the quality of the silk with its varying sheen to alleviate the exceeding flatness of the pattern. No treatment less broad would have done justice to the quality of the stuff, which in those days was worth consideration. Compare even the comparatively debased specimen of woollen damask on Plate 18, with the current designs in linen damask, and it will be seen how well advised were our grandfathers. Nineteenth century manufacturers who desire equally to exhibit the quality of their woof, can think of no other way of doing it than by leaving the ground for the most part empty. They



*Wool Damask
Early 19th Centy.*



"PHOTO-TINT," by J. Akerman, 6, Finsbury Square, W.C.

dearly love a spot pattern. Is it possibly out of consideration for the lady purchaser that modern table-linen is for the most part so *petite* in style? The consideration of the customer and not the thing to be done, is responsible for much of our modern misdoing.

In certain woven fabrics of our time the hope of disguising the shabbiness of the substance has prompted the adoption of the fussiest kind of pattern. One had need beware of textiles worried all over with pattern ; they are often expressly designed to hide shoddy. The manufacturer of *bonâ fide* silk, or wool, or other worthy material, would do well, for his part, to identify his goods with a kind of design which the baser fabrics cannot imitate without convicting themselves.

The character of the Lyons silk designs of the 17th and 18th centuries owes very much to the circumstance, that the lustrous material was so fascinating that artists were led astray from beautiful form, and simply revelled in the delights of colour. Charming as these silks often are, translate any one of the patterns into uncompromising black and white, and you are disillusioned at once. The most characteristic of them lose all their

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charm in monochrome. It is hard to realise that forms like those on Plate 19 can ever pass for beautiful; but it is wonderful what colour and texture will reconcile us to in the way of design. That is no reason why the artist should leave us to reconcile ourselves with ugly forms, still less why we should accept such models without attempting to improve upon them.

The Byzantine colouring, in bands, according to the weft (Plate 20) is almost brutal in its outspoken acceptance of the limitations of weaving.* It speaks volumes for the safety with which such limitations may be accepted, that the contradiction between the forms of the design and the scheme of colour does not in the least offend one in the silk. The same kind of thing occurs sometimes in Japanese stuffs.

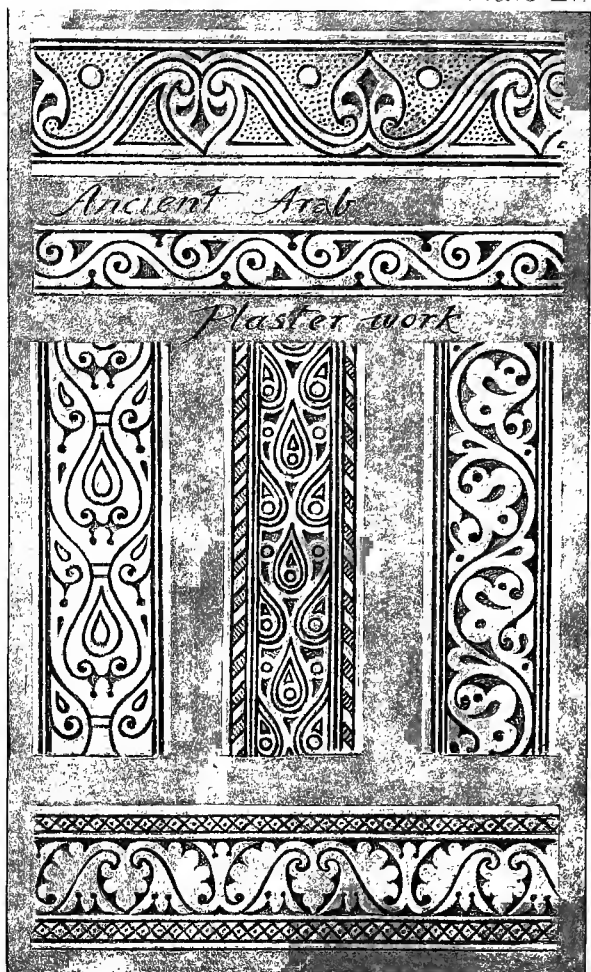
Until recently, the conventional treatment of foliated forms always and everywhere confessed quite frankly the way it was done. The so-called honeysuckle of the Greeks I have shown elsewhere† to be directly traceable to the use of the brush, as was the case

* See 'Anatomy of Pattern,' pp. 49, 50.

† See 'Everyday Art,' pp. 106-8.



Byzantine colouring according to the west.



"PHOTO-TINT", by J. Akerman, 6, Queen Square, W.C.

with other familiar forms of painted Greek ornament.

The Corinthian capital and the acanthus scroll, even when they most nearly approach nature (which is never very closely), are always modified according to the conditions of sculpture.

In the Byzantine version of the Classic leafage, in which the sculptors made abundant use of the drill, the drill-holes form an element in the design. The same thing occurs in much of the later Gothic foliage, more especially in German work.*

The Arabian borders on Plate 21 leave no possible doubt as to their having been traced on the plastic stucco with the modelling tool. The workman did what was simplest for him to do. We may be sure, too, that it was the ease with which the plaster could be manipulated, which led to the extraordinary elaboration characterising the impressed diapers on the walls of the Alhambra.

The somewhat savage enrichment of our own Norman buildings forcibly recalls the rude way it was done. It is more properly speaking chopped than carved.

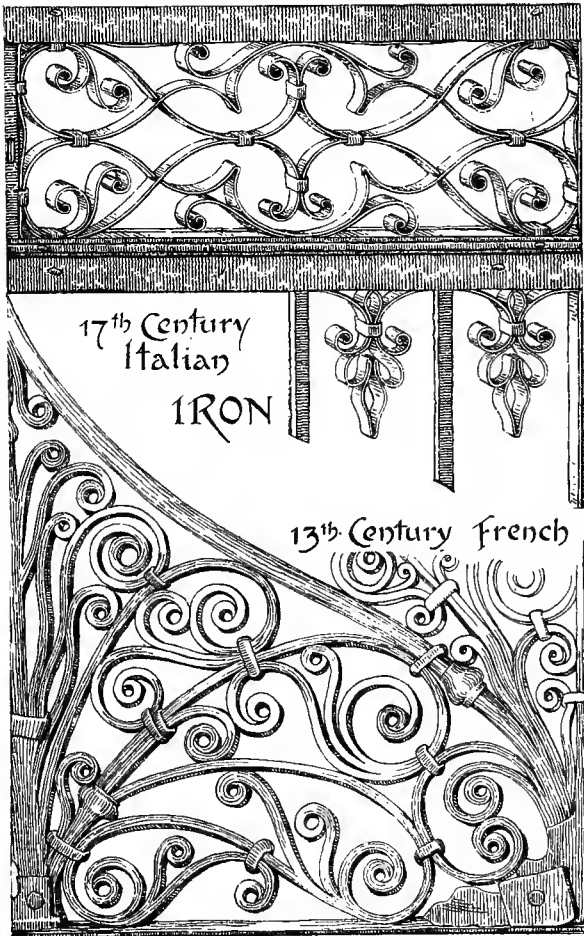
* See 'The Planning of Ornament,' Plate 24.

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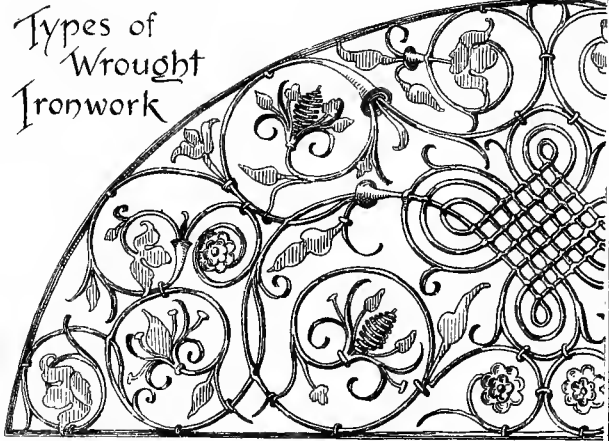
To refer to a specific material, you cannot look at the ironwork of any early period without seeing how directly the forge affected its design. It was the obvious thing to do to beat out the metal into a bar, and equally obvious to beat out the bar into the familiar spirals. And the very difficulty of forging a perfectly even bar was the surest preventive against mechanical results, such as we see in the handiwork of the modern smith, whose bars are made for him by machine.

The forms on Plate 22 belong more distinctly to the forge than to France of the 13th century or Italy of the 17th. The metal-workers in different parts of medieval Germany give different expression to their work (Plate 23). If a man had anything to say he expressed himself. A strong man would found a school. But it is smith's work everywhere. Even in the decadence of the art, when it bursts out into an uncomfortably bristling form of foliage, it breathes always the atmosphere of the forge. If nature inspired it, it was the hammer and the pincers that shaped it.

It is precisely for this reason that similar forms in cast iron are so singularly ill-judged.



Types of
Wrought
Ironwork



German 16th
Century.



There is nothing contemptible in cast iron, if we would but abstain from the reproduction in it of forms inappropriate to casting. We should have no cause to regret the institution of the foundry, if founders would but put art into their moulds ; and the first step towards that end would be, to dismiss from their memories the familiar forms of the forge. It is customary to talk about cast iron as if it were an abomination. It is its misapplication only that is objectionable. There is no reason why we should not do in iron something like what the Italians of the 15th century did in bronze—unless it be 19th century incompetence.

It is one of the wicked ways of our civilisation to smoothe out all character from workmanship. For idiomatic expression in ornament we have generally to travel back to a remote period. The angularity of the piece of darning on Plate 24 is what might be called old-fashioned. But how it explains itself! No one who cares for needlework would wish to have it otherwise.

So in embroidery (Plate 40) we look for colour and not perfect lines ; and so again in mosaic or stained glass (Plate 39),—just as

in glass-blowing (Plate 8) we properly expect to find lightness rather than precision of form.

In the pursuit of mechanical finish and the blind worship of nature, considerations of this kind are commonly lost sight of. The love of smoothness comes of our abuse of machinery. The love of nature is not, as the realists (so-called) would have us believe, an invention of to-day. Artists have always loved and studied nature. Only, in the historic treatment of natural forms, modelled in clay or plaster, carved in wood or stone, painted on wall or window, wrought in metal, or on a loom, or with the needle—there is always a touch of the tool which removes the rendering by so much,—let us not say from nature, for the instinct which directs such modifications is natural enough,—but from the imitation of nature.



"Pesto-Tint", by J. Akerman, 6, Queen Square, W.C.

V.

THE TEACHING OF THE TOOL.

Difficult as it may be for any but a workman quite to appreciate the influence of tools and treatment upon ornamental design, and so to trace the origin of time-honoured forms to their first cause—it is certain that nearly all forms of ornament may be followed back to a beginning in technique.

Take any tool in hand and proceed to design with it, and see what comes of the experiment. It will be something quite different from what you would have drawn with a pencil on paper, and something much less literally like any natural object: and according to the tool employed will be the character of your design.

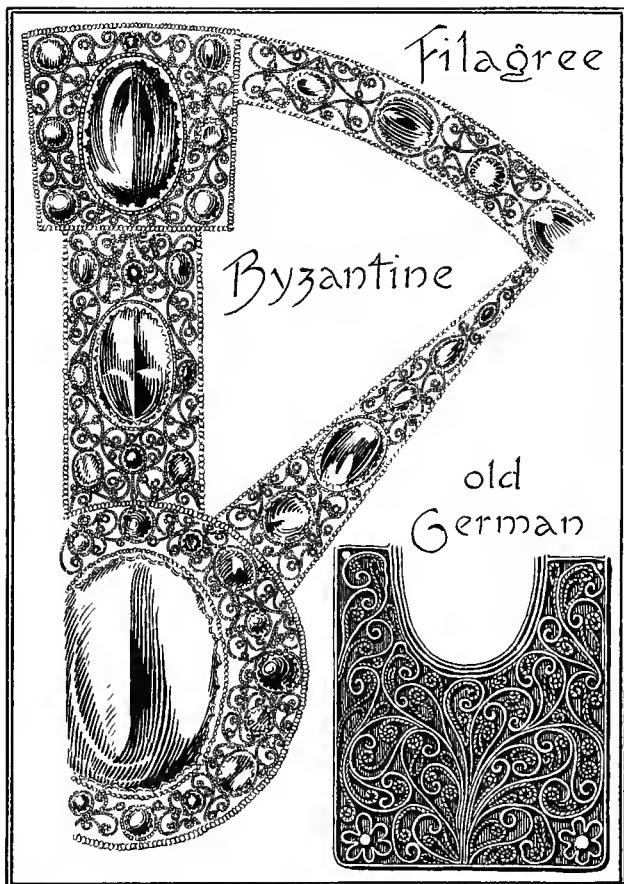
The process of *repoussé* work or embossing will serve for an example. You lay a sheet of brass or copper, with its face downwards, on a bed or cushion of pitch, and proceed with tools of various shapes and sizes to

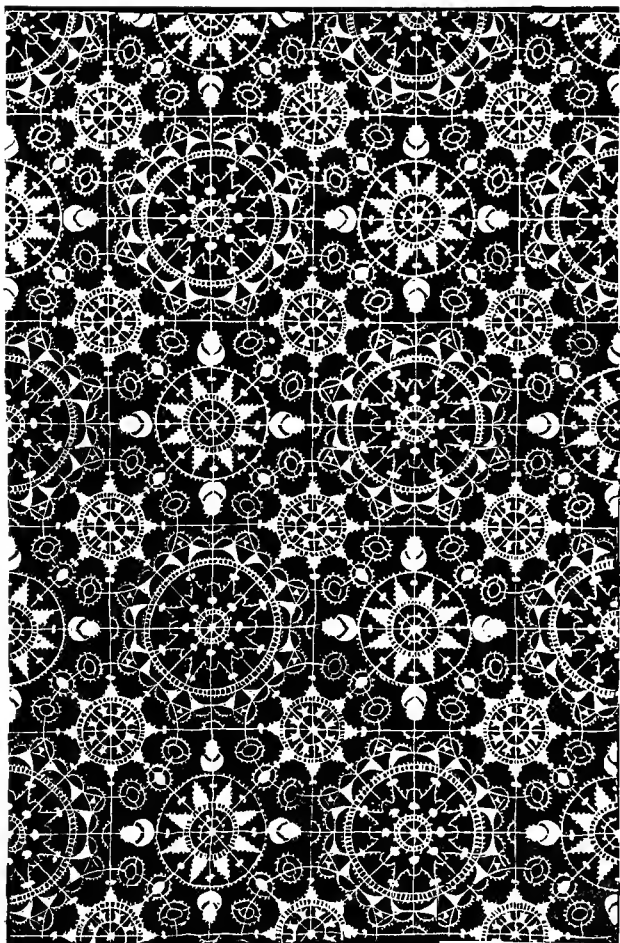
punch the pattern from the back. Now, if you have any feeling for the material at all (and if you have not, you have mistaken your vocation), you begin very naturally to do what can be done in it. Accordingly you set to work to beat out certain round bosses, Plate 25, A, which you surround with smaller bosses, B, arriving so at something like flowers. These you go on to connect with rounded stems, C, from which grows a kind of foliage, D, large or small in detail, as need may be, but always more or less bulbous in shape. We have thus a pattern, which is characteristically *repoussé*, beaten work, and which has grown to a great extent out of the conditions under which you were working.

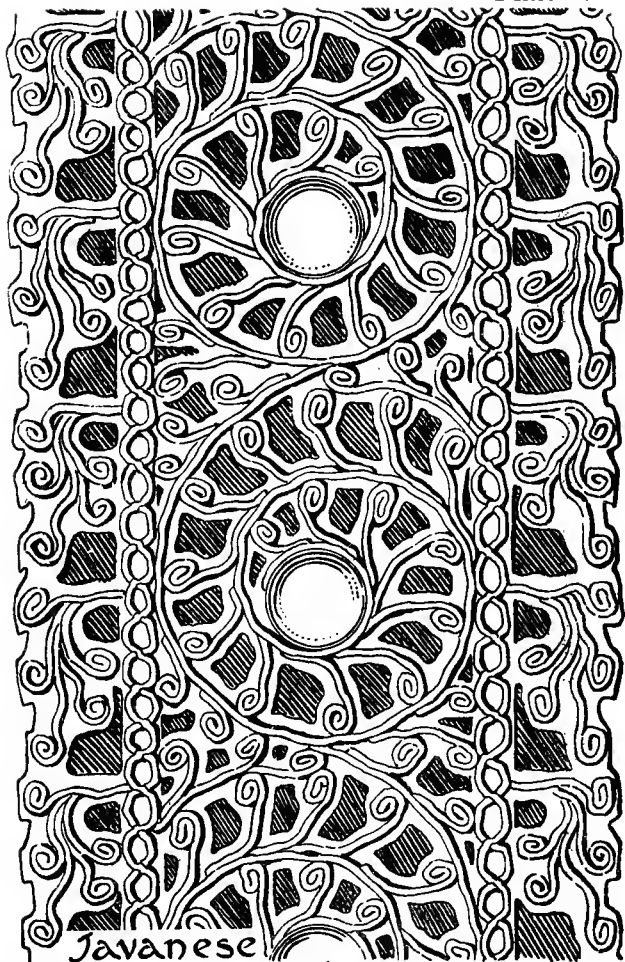
Plate 25 pretends to do no more than illustrate this method of proceeding. Your bosses may take the form of figures, animals, or what not; yet, in the hands of a sympathetic workman, they will not cease, whatever their individual shape or interest, to be always bosses. It is your unsympathetic workman who designs without foreseeing how every detail is to be carried out, and misses the characteristic qualities of his material.



"PHOTO-TINT", by J. Akerman, 5, Queen Square. A.C.







Javanese
Ornament inspired by way of working

It cannot be insisted upon too strongly that, in designing for ornament, it is absolutely essential always to have those conditions in mind, as clearly as though you were yourself working under them.

In beaten work you descend from the mass to the minutiae; in filagree, on the contrary, you would work from the minutiae to the mass. Commencing with wiry lines, you would perhaps clothe them with more compact spirals, clustering these together where you wished to concentrate the effect. The design of the Byzantine artist of a thousand years ago is not, you will see (Plate 26), very different from that of the medieval silver-smith, nor yet from that of the Genoese and Maltese artificer of to-day.

This is the type of all ornament in delicately elaborate line, as, for instance, damascening, embroidery in gold or silken outline, and, on a larger scale, hammered ironwork. Substituting straight lines for curved, it has its parallel in certain kinds of lacework, such as the so-called "Greek lace." (Plate 27.)

A very curious instance of design directly inspired by the way of working occurs in the Javanese work on Plate 28. Some plastic

substance, paper or gutta-percha, is rolled out into the thickness of stout wire, curled round into spirals, and laid on papier-mâché. The ground is then partly fretted away and the whole gilded. There is something delightfully naïve in the result.

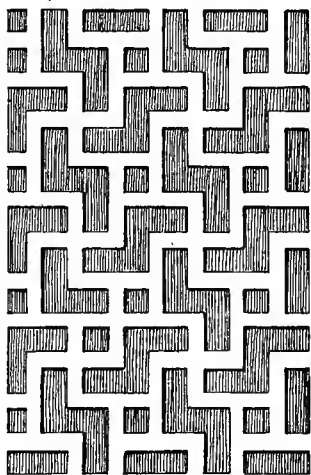
Fret cutting affords another homely illustration. The very necessities of the saw suggest the nature of the design. You are led to devise some form of pierced ornament not unlike stencilling ; or, if you prefer to cut away the ground instead of the pattern, you are compelled to hold the design together by ties.

Unless these ties were from the first taken into account, they would be sure to mar the effect. The artist, accordingly, finds himself, as if by instinct, evolving a kind of strap-work, which reminds one of the typical Elizabethan ornament—which very possibly originated in some such device as fret carving, although the forms show also the influence of types more proper to metal. The likeness of the strip of low-relief pattern-work, on Plate 29, to fret cutting, is too striking to be merely accidental. The relationship challenges recognition.

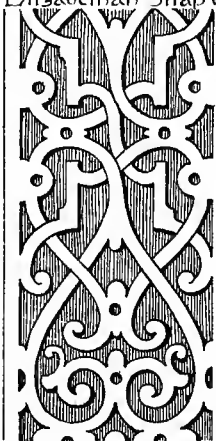
Embossed fret in Metal - German



Arab fret-work in Wood



Elizabethan Strap-work



In the comparative massiveness or delicacy of a fret pattern, one sees at once whether it was designed for stone, or wood, or metal. The artful fret-worker leaves no frail projecting ends, in stone or wood to be promptly broken off, and in metal to catch hold of any textile thing that may brush against them. The strength of a metal fret naturally affords facility for indulging in more florid forms of ornament. The iron lock-plate represented on Plate 29 shows this, and exemplifies besides how the metal may be in part embossed, and, of course, engraved.

Even simpler and more direct than fretwork is the plan of notching thin planks of wood and crossing them (as in Plate 30). It has all the effect of elaborate fretwork. The acme of simplicity is shown in the no less ingenious device of placing the notched planks side by side, so as to produce a pierced pattern of singular effectiveness. Instances of this, taken from the balconies of Swiss chalets, are given on the same plate with the Arab lattices referred to above.

The likeness between a fret pattern and a stencil pattern is explained when one realises that a stencil plate is a fret of cartridge paper,

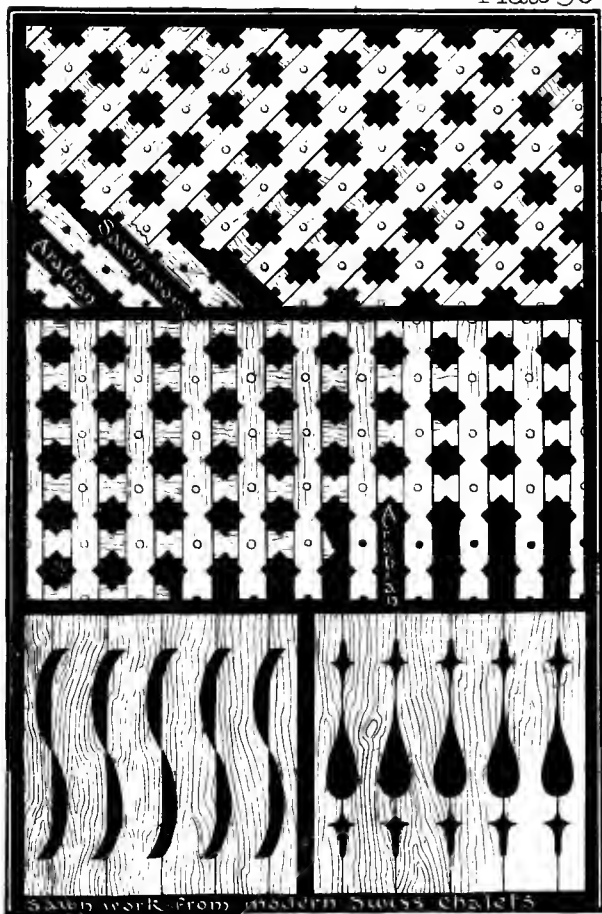
through which the design is rubbed in, the plate protecting the ground.

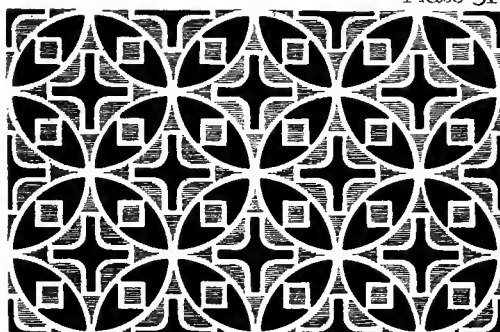
Stencilling is very properly used in decoration as a means of laying in a first painting only, in which case one may do with it what one will, or what one can. One may even, by the use of a succession of plates, produce most elaborate designs. An ordinary Italian house decorator will manage to stencil a wall surface with a gorgeously rich damask pattern, at a cost not exceeding that of equally effective wall-paper.

A stencil pattern proper should, however, be designed to be stencilled right off, without needing to be made good at all by hand. This principle is illustrated in Plate I, which by its construction owns to being stencilled. It is a bastard kind of design that is ashamed of its origin.

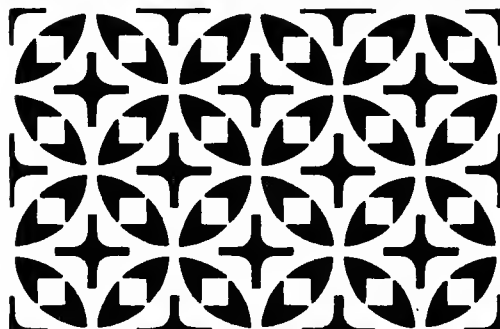
Ties, it will be seen, may well be turned to account to form a pattern on the pattern, to give detail, such as the veining of large leaves, or otherwise to break up the broader masses of the design.

The geometric diaper on Plate 31 is obviously produced by means of two stencils, the outline being formed by the portion of

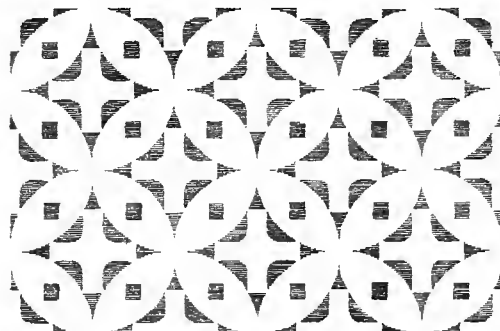




Design complete



Second stencil



First stencil

the ground left clear. In the case of an elaborate series of stencils each one may be schemed to make good the ties of another; but, to the workman at least, there will always be an interest in the evidence of the way an effect has been produced. He looks for character as well as beauty.

It must be confessed that he is the only one who does. This merit of workmanlike-ness is one which the public cannot, as I said, be expected to appreciate. It is reserved for the craftsman to recognise behind his work a craftsman with whom it is his pride to claim fellowship. His interest in it is not alone in seeing how another solved a difficulty which had occurred to himself, or took advantage of an accident which to him had been fruitful only of disappointment. He has a thrill of purest satisfaction in feeling how some one, far away and years ago perhaps, realised, as he does, that this, and not that, was the spirit in which such and such thing should be done, such and such material should be treated, saw the same hint in nature as he sees, or felt the same limitation in his art as he feels. This is the satisfaction, not of the sentimentalist but of the workman. And no workman of any

account will be satisfied without the approbation of the fellow-workman he respects.

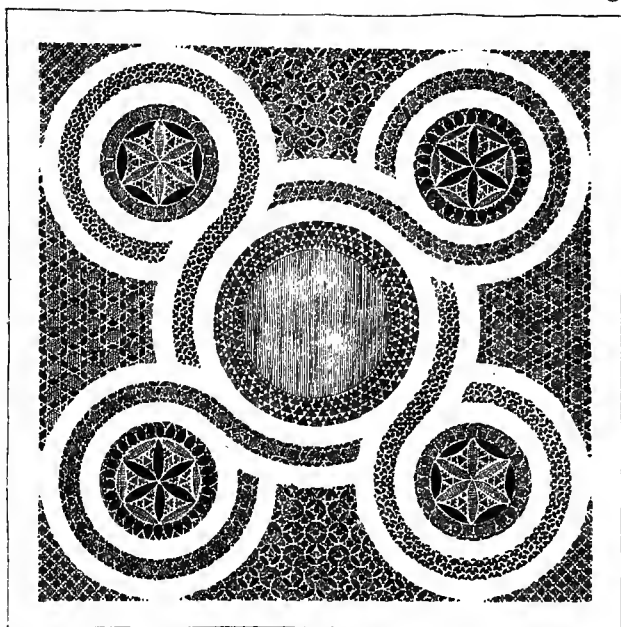
The tooled book-binding illustrated on Plate 32 is interesting rather to the craftsman than to the artist. The ingenuity with which a few simple and rather insignificant tools are made to suffice towards a somewhat florid effect, shows the practised hand.

Our wonder at the splendid scheme of architectural colouring which prevailed in Italy, settles down into the conviction that it was encouraged, if not wholly suggested, by the gorgeousness of the multi-coloured marbles within easy reach. This it was which led also to the development of a kind of decoration, very characteristically mosaic, in which the beauty of the material is displayed in large slabs of rich veneer, whilst the waste is used up in the form of geometric pattern work, the design of which is literally cut according to the chips. The contrast between the broad surfaces and the minute mosaic is exceedingly happy.

The large circular slabs of porphyry which form so prominent a feature in the pavements of Byzantine churches in Italy, notably in many of the Roman Basilicas (Plate 33),



"PHOTO-TINT", by J. AKERMAN, 17, Queen Square, W.C.



Inlaid Mosaic Pavement

San Marco Rome

afford yet further evidence of the dependence of design upon the conditions of material. These circular plaques are in fact so many slices of old columns, saved from the wreckage of more ancient buildings, and put to this ingenious use.

The common adoption of geometric patterns for inlaid pavements was countenanced by the circumstance that the unequal and accidental colour of the marble cubes, just counteracted the tendency to mechanical hardness, in which lies the danger of purely geometric ornament.

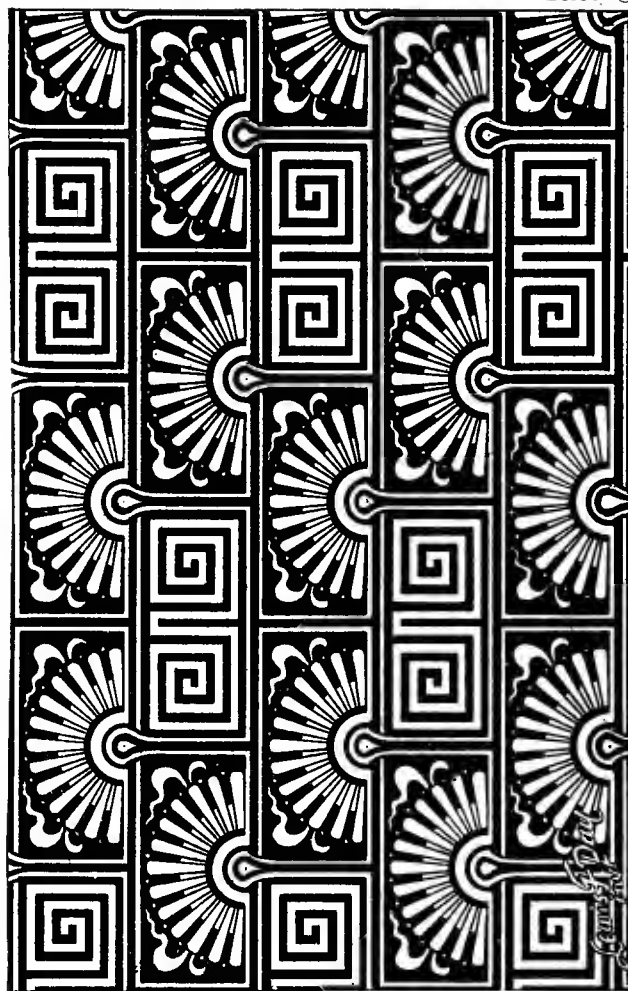
In marquetry, similar geometric forms were found, for similar reasons, to be serviceable, so that one may say that, whether in wood, or mother-o'-pearl, or marble, a style of inlaid pattern-work was begotten of the very facility of shaping and laying geometric forms, by the certainty of the harmonising influence of colour.

It is in the inlay of natural woods and stones and the like that we find the most satisfactory use of absolutely geometric pattern. The accidental variation of the natural colours is exactly the thing needful. Unexpectedness of tint makes amends for cer-

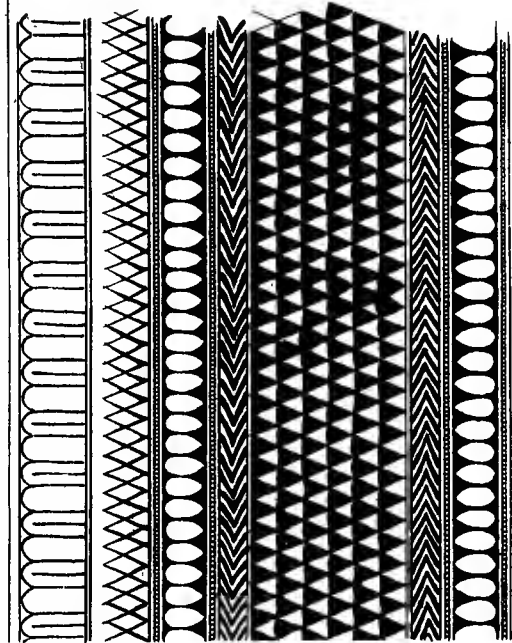
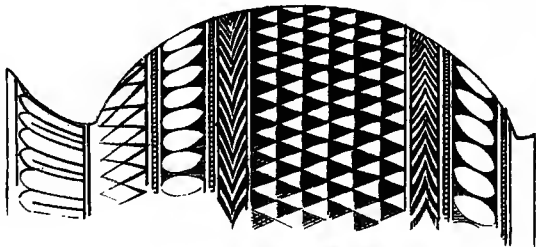
tainty of shape, and gives an air of mystery to what would otherwise be only so much mechanism. The rigid forms of the diaper on Plate 34 are plainly in need of some such softening influence of colour. Again, in geometric ornament like the "niello" on Plate 35, the silvery brilliancy of the metal glorifies, so to speak, the nakedness of the design.

So in the ornamental glass mosaic so often used in Italy about Giotto's time in connection with white marble, the shimmer of the surface, more especially as it was never absolutely even, put all contingency of harshness out of the question. Such a thing was barely possible with all those little facets of glass catching the light at all manner of angles, and glittering each according to its own bright will.

In marble inlay of strongly contrasted colour there is no such excuse for severity of form; some of the old pavement patterns, that for example in the baptistry at Florence (Plate 36), are exceedingly graceful in design. Even there you see the influence of the material. The desirability of maintaining the solidity of the white slabs into which the blackish-green



Inlay Patterns in which severity of line would be softened by colour of woods



Brass Pot in "niello" of common Indian workmanship

is inlaid, has led to a kind of network of white enclosing the darker tints, by which means the contrast between light and dark is most judiciously softened. These patterns would stencil perfectly. They are, in fact, fretted in marble.

Here it may be as well to remark that, though a stencil is a kind of fret, a fret is not exactly the same as a stencil. In designing a stencil the ties are the main consideration. In designing a fret, the connection of the openings is an important point. One must as much as possible avoid the hindrance of perpetually removing and refixing the saw, which, in fretting a stencil pattern such as that on Plate 1, would take almost as much time as the actual cutting. Long, smooth, sweeping lines are also suggested by the saw, the backward and forward action involved in following jagged lines, such as the serrated edges of leaves, resulting in some waste of labour.

Very characteristic design occurs in the wooden lattice work which has lately been imported from Cairo, and freely used (not always with discretion) in the decoration and furniture of English houses (Plate 37). Better

lattices it would be difficult to find, or a better means of employing otherwise not very useful scraps of wood, or a better employment of wood turning. This Cairene woodwork indicates equally the scarcity of large timber, the cheapness of labour, and the dependence upon the lathe. Had the conditions been other, we should never have had 'just such patterns as the Arab builders evolved in infinite variety.

The characterlessness of 19th century ornament is due very largely to the absence of any direct impress of the tool upon design. In the process of modern manufacture, everything is planed down to a marvellous but monotonous smoothness; the mark of the tool, which is the evidence of workmanlikeness, is popularly regarded even as bad work—want of finish, indeed. Even in this age of enlightenment there are some who have yet to learn that work may be smooth and smug, and yet not beautiful, nor so much as finished.

This mistaken ideal of perfection is not, it must be owned, altogether a modern one. In tapestry, for example, designers have been working for centuries past, steadily in the pictorial direction, and against the threads;

Plate 36.



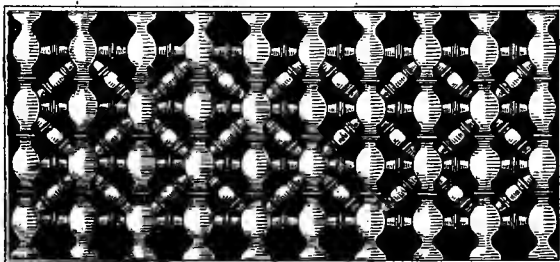
"PHOTO-TINT", by J. Akerman, 5, Queen Square, N. Y.

until there is now little difference between the picture and its copy in wool, except that the copy costs ever so much more than the original. Already in the comparatively early tapestries of Raffaele, you can see at Dresden or Beauvais what inferior and characterless hangings his famous cartoons make, as compared with the neighbouring designs of earlier, unknown, and less accomplished draughtsmen, who knew their trade. That Raffaele either knew little or cared little about tapestry, is clear. And in his failure there is some consolation for the least of us. If we only love our trade, and know it (as only those can who love it) we may succeed where a Raffaele would fail, though we be anything but Raffaelles. It is easier said than done, for a great painter to step down to mastery in the minor arts. All trades want learning.

The crowning point of ignorance and inconsistency in design is reached where the convention peculiar to and characteristic of some quite different material is affected, as in the bulbous forms of beaten metal reproduced in 15th century Gothic stonework, or the facets of Brobdingnag jewels in Elizabethan wood-carving.

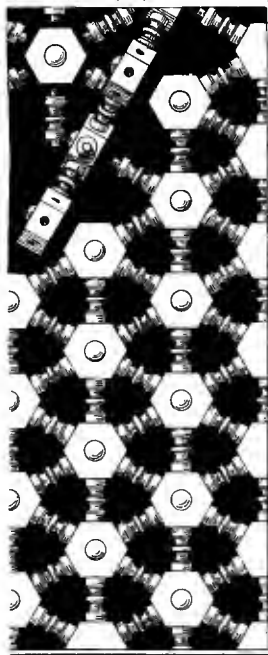
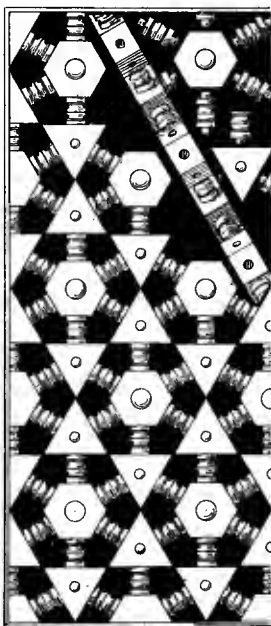
The modern Frenchman seems to have no conscience at all in this respect. He will copy anything in any material, and be proud of himself. He is not to be persuaded that the characteristic lines of darning for example (Plate 24), when reproduced in wall paper are simply broken lines, as meaningless as they are awkward.

Affectation of that kind seems to throw into stronger relief the fitness of fit ornament.



Arab Lattices

characteristic Wood-turning



VI.

SOME SUPERSTITIONS.

Out of the practical conditions of work have arisen elements of design so distinctly decorative that they are sometimes taken to be inseparable from ornament and essential to it. Flatness of effect, symmetry of distribution, firmness of outline, and other such useful devices, have been adopted as articles of a rather too credulous faith. That is a proud position to which they are by no means entitled. They are at the best working rules, a sort of *recipe*, not without use, but useful mainly to those who are not much in need of such help.

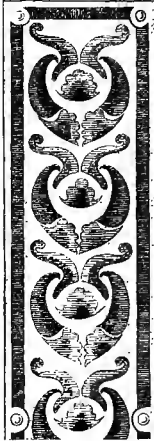
Let us inquire into one of these superstitions—outline. It is of such use in ornament, and so often useful, that it has come to be accepted by certain theorists as a necessity of the case ; with them it is the passport to “the decorative.” Useful as an outline is in decoration, it is not, however, inevitable. Nor

is it so easy to say just where an outline should be used.

In very many cases, the material and its workmanlike employment necessitate an outline. They may even determine its colour, as in the case of the metal lines marking the cells in which the paste of enamel is laid. And it is curious to notice how, in *champlevé* enamel, where the cells for the paste are dug out of the metal ground, the outlines are of varying thickness; whilst in *cloisonné* work the even section of the wire soldered on to form the cells, necessitates an absolutely even strength of line.

You have only to look at the quality of the outline, to tell at once whether enamel is *champlevé* (a sort of niello in colours instead of black) or *cloisonné*. The evangelistic emblem on Plate 38 combines the two processes. You can distinguish the solid metal from the wire-work quite plainly.

You find that when the more laborious process of cutting out the ground is used, the artist adopts a larger treatment, and is altogether more chary of his lines, omitting them even, and blending one colour into another. The method invites the use of broad



12th Century
German



13th Century
French



ENAMEL
Champlevé
&
Cloisonné

11th Century
Italian

spaces of plain metal, which in their turn tempt to engraving—although thereby there is a danger of disturbing too much the breadth and beauty of the polished surface, a danger successfully avoided by the artist of the twelfth century (Plate 38).

In soldering on the flat wire, on the other hand, one is induced to elaborate a network of lines, such as we see in Chinese and Japanese enamel, too familiar to need illustration.

Thickness of outline is not unusually regulated by material. Another case in point is the leadwork by which a stained-glass window is held together. Glazing being, in richly-coloured glass, a necessity, the art of designing it consists partly in throwing the lead lines into the outlines (Plate 39). The leading of a mosaic window corresponds exactly to the *cloisons* of enamel, just as the pierced plaster windows of Cairo may be compared to enlarged transparencies in *champlevé*.

In *appliqué* embroidery, again (Plate 40), it is practically something of a necessity to mask the joints by an outline of gold or silken cord, very much to the enhancement

of the general effect. In short, there is every reason to follow the lead given us by the material. It does not do to play altogether from your own hand ; the material is, so to speak, our partner in the game of decoration.

An artist will seldom resort of his own free will to an even and rigid outline all round every form. Excepting at a great distance from the eye (where its equality is not seen), that is almost certain to result in hardness. Mechanical precision is not seldom the manufacturer's ideal of finish. It is one, unfortunately, which he can all too easily realise—at a loss of what beauty of feeling and colour, he can probably never be brought to know.

The instinct of art is rather to lose an outline, more or less, in places, and not to insist upon it unless its value is sufficient to justify the risk its use entails. The only rule which can be laid down as to the use of outline, is so extremely simple as not altogether to satisfy the pedantic mind : if the need of an outline is apparent, then adopt it ; but if not, if the effect is satisfactory without it, why on earth should one insist upon its use ? For a reason—yes ; but not otherwise.



'PHOTO-TINT', by J. Akerman, 6, Queen Square, W.C.

The insistence upon outline for the sake of outline, as though decoration were not decoration without this official stamp of pedantry, this trade mark of the decorating shop, is pure nonsense.

The truth is, outline is frequently just a matter of expediency, and no more. And a very wise and fit expedient it is, if only in view of that process of reproduction which is admitted to be one of the necessities of modern decoration, and particularly of modern ornament.

The vaguer forms which depend so much upon the touch and feeling of the artist do not lend themselves to this necessity of reproduction. An outline does. And if, in outlining his drawing, the designer cannot help in some degree hardening it, the evil is infinitely less than if more undefined and delicate forms had been left to the tender mercies of another.

Moreover there are cases in which some consolation awaits the man who has the courage to make his design such as the available mechanic can render. The hard outlines of stained glass are blurred by the spreading of the light as it shines through ;

the hard shapes drawn for the damask weaver are redeemed by the sheen of silk or linen,—and so on. In such cases the artist who has been equal to the emergency will often find again in the executed work something of the delicacy belonging to his original.

Even in autograph work, where the artist executes his own design, he still avails himself of a soft outline. Decorative art is a kind of shorthand. Its very existence seems to depend upon its being done with readiness, quickness, and certainty—so that he who runs may read.

The art which only careful scrutiny reveals to us will, for the most part, fail to win appreciation. Whatever its merits, if it hide them, no wonder that men pass them by. Even poetry of the over-subtle order is not popular; and decorative art (unpopular though it be) is essentially popular art.

The effectiveness so much to be desired in decorative art, has to be obtained without many of the resources of which the painter is free to avail himself. It is not often that the ornamentist can indulge in extremes of light and shade, nor yet in very strong modelling. Under these circumstances, an outline



is invaluable in helping to detach a pattern from its background. It is not generally understood how effectually even a delicate outline will sometimes do this (Plate 41).

In work placed at a great distance from the eye, outline is quite the simplest means of definition. The greater the distance off, and the less the contrast in tone and colour between the design and its background, the more urgent something of the kind becomes.

For all that, there is no law making outline compulsory, unless the artist feels the need of it. He may, if he please, detach his pattern from the ground by deepening the one, or lightening the other, or by doing both. That would, however, ordinarily be a much more laborious business. Besides, it is only fair to assume that there was always some reason for the choice of tones adopted in the first instance; and it may be anything but desirable to modify them. So it happens that in many instances the expedient of an outline is most handy. It enables one deliberately and safely to adopt a scheme of colour which, but for it, would be altogether ineffective.

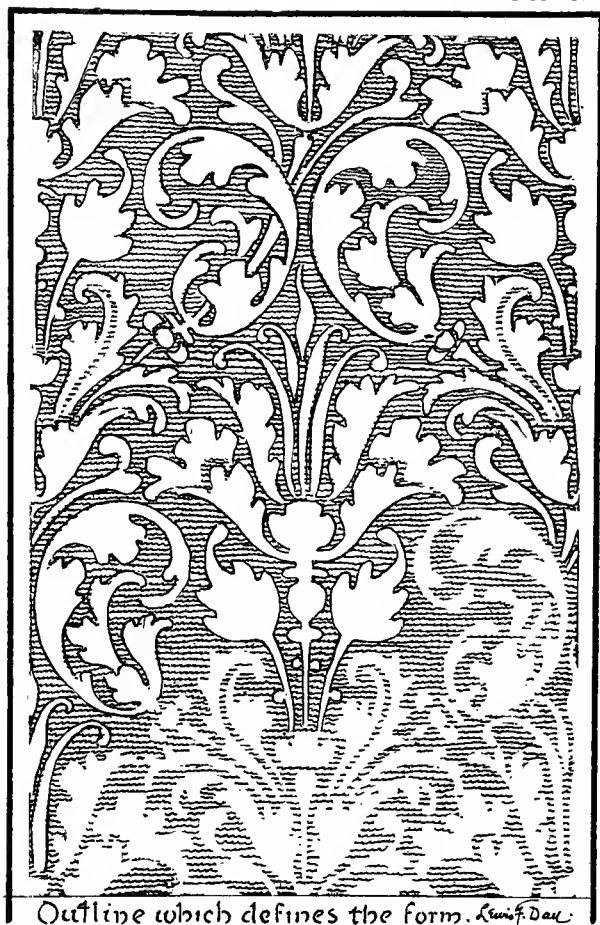
So far from invariably hardening or empha-

sising form, outline may equally be used for the diametrically opposite purpose of softening the shapes, as may be seen on Plate 42, where a small portion of the pattern is harsh by comparison with the part outlined. The softening effect of outline is exemplified also in the embroidery on Plate 40.

The use of outline must not be taken as a justification of its abuse. To accept the dogma of its saving merit and submit to its tyranny, is sheer foolishness. Art may quite well be decorative in which the outline is not emphasised ; nor does the insistence upon it make design decorative, however effectually it may remove it from the pictorial.

So with regard to flatness, symmetry, and other qualities supposed to pertain to decorative treatment,—one must in every instance use one's wits. Any effect of relief which disturbs the sense of flatness in a surface characteristically flat, is plainly out of place. Just so much of symmetry as may be needful to convey the sense of balance is to be desired—but no more.

The fear of offending against the arbitrary laws of authority, often altogether "irresponsible," is a bogey which may scare some from



Outline which defines the form. *Louis F. Day.*



Outline which softens the forms *Lewis J. Day.*

trespassing on dangerous ground, but which certainly deters others from adventuring on fields of design in which they might perhaps discover the full use of their artistic faculty.

What is called convention is not a hindrance to the workman, but a help. If he finds it an impediment, he would do well to ask himself if that may not be his fault.

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